

“Waiting For God”

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Isa. 65:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

“Therefore, keep awake—

for you do not know when the master of the house will come,
in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,
or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.”

Mark 13:35-36

Let us pray... O God,

We wait for you to make your presence known.

Though we might prefer you to enter our lives in a dramatic way,
help us to recognize how you are already here.

Amen

Do you remember when you couldn't wait for Christmas?

You couldn't wait to see the Christmas tree with all the trimmings lit up
and all the presents underneath?

You couldn't wait for the big dinner with family and friends
and all the food with all the fixin's?

And – when you became an adult, how you couldn't wait for it all to be over?

You couldn't wait for everyone to go home so you could
get all the wrappings thrown out and the dishes cleaned up
and the tree and all the ornaments put away?

It can be like that for ministers during the Christmas season –
the relief of getting through it all.

But I try to avoid the temptation of being a Grinch

by remembering that it is still about the joy of anticipation.

And Advent itself is specifically about waiting...

Waiting has been an important discipline in the historic spiritual traditions
of our church.

An example is the labyrinth –

when the Crusades made pilgrimages to the Holy Land
impractical for most people, they had the option of
'walking the labyrinth' like the one at Chartres Cathedral in France.

And when you walk a labyrinth like that, with all its twists and turns,
it forces you to slow down...

In the monastic tradition of religious orders

like the Trappists, Carthusians, and Carmelites,

silence is another way to slow people down in their routine
to help them concentrate on their relationship with God.

Willard, p.2

Now the way monasteries use silence as a discipline may vary,
and there was this particular abbey where the initiates
were introduced to the practice of silence upon their arrival.

So, the abbot said to the novice,

“You are not to speak for an entire day and return to my office
this time tomorrow when you may say only two words.”

And the novice did as he was told

and came back to the abbot the next day and said,

“No-o blanket-t-t.”

The abbot said,

“Ah, we’ll see to that. Very good for your first day.

Now you are not to speak for a week.

Report back to me then and you will be allowed to say two words.”

So, the novice did as he was told and went through the daily cycles
of devotion, duties, and community meals, day after day.

At the end of the week, he returned and said,

“Cold food.”

The abbot said,

“Ah, we’ll see to that. Now you must remain in silence for three months.

Come back then when you may say two words.”

So, the novice did as he was told and at the end of three months

he came back to the abbot and said,

“I quit!”

And the abbot said,

“Perhaps it’s just as well. You haven’t even been here a year yet,
but all you’ve done is complain!”

Most of us wouldn’t want to have to be quiet for a whole day,
let alone a week, a month, or maybe even 10 minutes!

But the wisdom in it is to quiet your mind from the busy-ness
of distracting thoughts, worries, and so forth

that may keep you from getting necessary tasks done
or just noticing joy when it finally shows up.

Taking time to quiet yourself in the midst of some crisis –

and especially then, will help you to deal with the situation better.

And one of the ways that God comes to us is as a ‘still, small voice’

as it did for the Prophet Elijah despite earthquakes, windstorms, and fire.

Willard, p.3

Sometimes we have to wait a long time
to make sense of what we are going through.
Sometimes we have to wait a long time
for God to show up in our lives.
And sometimes we just have to look a little closer...

Great art keeps you looking –
and not only does it keep you looking for something new,
but you can actually find something new.
And often this has nothing to do with what the artist or author
originally intended.

I never actually saw the play, “Waiting For Godot”,
but what I have heard about it describes the human condition
of trying to make sense of the absurd things that happen in life
and accepting that we may just have to go on waiting.

In 1999, “Waiting For Godot” was
*voted the most significant English language play of the 20th century
in a British Royal National Theatre poll of 800 playwrights, actors,
directors and journalists.*

<http://www.samuel-beckett.net/BerlinTraffic.html>

*Waiting for Godot follows two days in the lives of a pair of men
who divert themselves while they wait expectantly and in vain
for someone named Godot to arrive.
They claim him as an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him,
admitting that they would not recognise him were they to see him.
To occupy themselves, they eat, sleep, converse, argue, sing, play games,
exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide –
anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay".*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waiting_for_Godot

Sounds exciting doesn't it?

Maybe not, but there is something there that allows for comparison
with the desire to be present with God.

The playwright, Samuel Beckett, denies that this play is simply about
waiting for God – though there are many religious metaphors in the play
like a tree onstage that suggests the cross.

Waiting for God to show up in our lives can be counter-productive
if we try to put God in the box limited by our own expectations –
and so we may miss an opportunity to really see
how God is already here.

Willard, p.4

It would be like those guards who heard Jesus cry out from the cross,
‘Eli, Eli’ which means ‘My God, my God’ in Matt. 27:45-50.

Someone said he was calling for Elijah
and someone else went to get a sponge soaked with wine to give to him
and still someone else said,
‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’

They wanted to see something spectacular –
and ignored the Son of God who was crucified there before them.

God in Christ was right there and they missed it –

but we can also miss what’s happening right in front of us.
Like the proverbial pot that never boils while watching it,
or like kids staying up late to catch Santa Clause in the act,
God is not going to cooperate with just being a spectacle.
Rather than waiting for God to show up in some spectacular fashion,
maybe we need to patiently wait while at the same time
go about our lives as if God is already here.

Maybe we need to just go about doing the work of preparing for Christmas
like getting gifts for others.

But better yet – be the gift yourself.

Let your presence be the present you give to others
to help them "hold the terrible silence [of being alone] at bay".

Maybe we need to be doing that work of God
that we’d like to see done for ourselves, but done for the sake of others.

The next thing you know, you’ve already gotten ‘into the Christmas Spirit’
without trying to do it.

Though most of us know about as much about God as those two tramps
waiting for someone called Godot,
there have been people throughout history who were blessed
with experiences of divine insight.

And those who interpreted their insights as a message from God were ready –
they were open to what God was doing in their lives
and they affirmed its meaning by sharing what they had witnessed.

And two words that Jesus is still speaking to us in our time are:

‘Keep awake.’

So, don’t worry about “getting into the Christmas spirit”,
but just keep awake, keep a-waiting – and keep a-doing
and you will find yourself ready when God through Christ
finally does shows up.

Amen

Isa. 65:1-9

65:1 I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,
to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, 'Here I am, here I am',
to a nation that did not call on my name.

2 I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;

3 a people who provoke me to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks;

4 who sit inside tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat swine's flesh,
with broth of abominable things in their vessels;

5 who say,
'Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.'

These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all day long.

6 See, it is written before me:

I will not keep silent, but I will repay;

I will indeed repay into their laps

7 their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together,
says the Lord;

because they offered incense on the mountains
and reviled me on the hills,

I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions.

8 Thus says the Lord:

As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say,

'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it',
so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all.

9 I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,

and from Judah inheritors of my mountains;

my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.

Mark 13:24-37

[Jesus said,]

24 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,

25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds"
with great power and glory.

27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson:

as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves,
you know that summer is near.

29 So also, when you see these things taking place,
you know that he is near, at the very gates.

30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away
until all these things have taken place.

31 Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows,
neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33 Beware, keep alert;
for you do not know when the time will come.

34 It is like a man going on a journey,
when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work,
and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake—
for you do not know when the master of the house will come,
in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,

36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

*45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land
until three in the afternoon.*
*46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice,
'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is,
 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*
*47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said,
 'This man is calling for Elijah.'*
*48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine,
 put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.*
*49 But the others said,
 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.'*
50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

*A guy walks up to his front door one night,
 sees a snail on the steps, and kicks it into the bushes.
Three years later he hears a knock on the door.
 It's the snail.
The guy looks down, the snail looks up and says:
 'What... was that all about?'*

Tim Allen, *I'm Not Really Here*, pp. 58-59